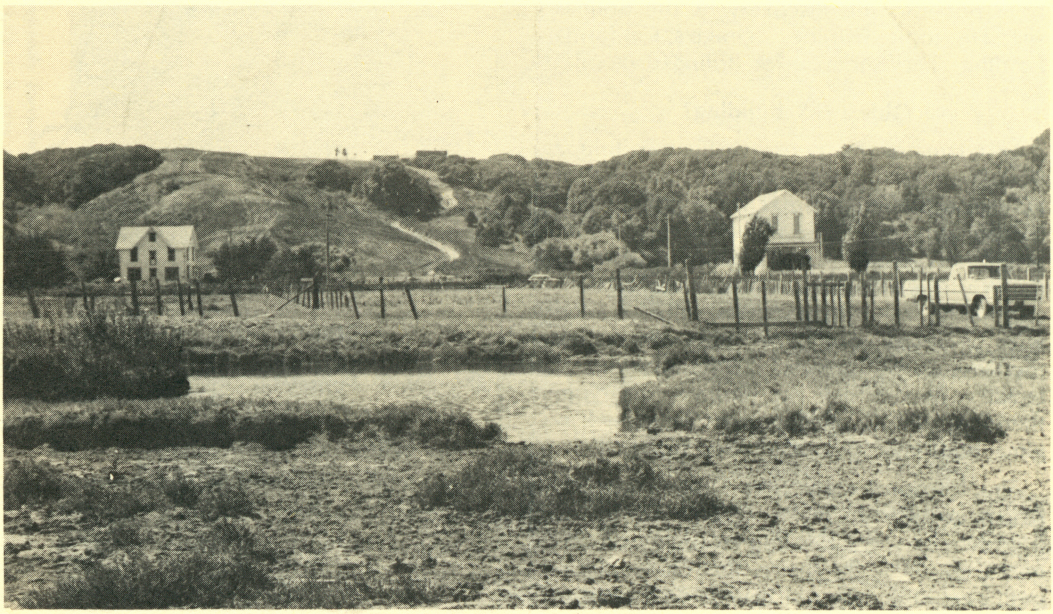
Contra Costa County Historical Society

BULLETIN

POST OFFICE BOX 190 FEBRUARY 15, 1974 MARTINEZ, CALIFORNIA

Drake's Landing Historian Will Argue Case For Bolinas as Site of 1579 Ship Repair



This Bolinas Lagoon reservoir site is the latest discovery in a long list of places claimed to be the location of Sir Francis Drake's headquarters in California for 36 days in 1579.

The controversy over Sir Francis Drake's landing in California will rage anew when Society members gather for dinner February 28th to hear a prominent historian relate the discovery of a new archeological site which he says "in all probability" is Drake's Fort.

Exactly where the English explorer brought his doughty ship, the **Golden Hinde,** to shore for 36 days of repairs in 1579 has been the subject of an historical brouhaha for decades. Drake's Bay at Point Reyes, Angel Island, Point San Quentin and even Tomales and Bodega — all have been described by authorities of the Elizabethan era as the correct place.

Now comes Dr. V. Aubrey Neasham, California state historian between 1953-1960, and previously the regional historian in San Francisco for the National Park Service, who contends that Drake built temporary headquarters for his 70-man crew about a mile north of Bolinas.

Reservoir site

The specific location, he declares, is where there are the remains of an old reservoir constructed in 1872. Ringed now with a barbed wire fence, the reservoir was built atop the ruins of Drake's Fort, Neasham explains.

(Continued on page 2)

Historian and Archeologist Teamed Up in Historic Find

(Continued from page 1)

At the Society's all-membership meeting, to be held at the Red Rooster Restaurant, Walnut Creek, Dr. Neasham will tell the story of the famed explorer's landing and the work that he and archeologist William E. Pritchard have put into the discovery of the Bolinas site. His topic will be: "Drake's California Landing: The Evidence for Bolinas Lagoon."

Oldest U.S. building?

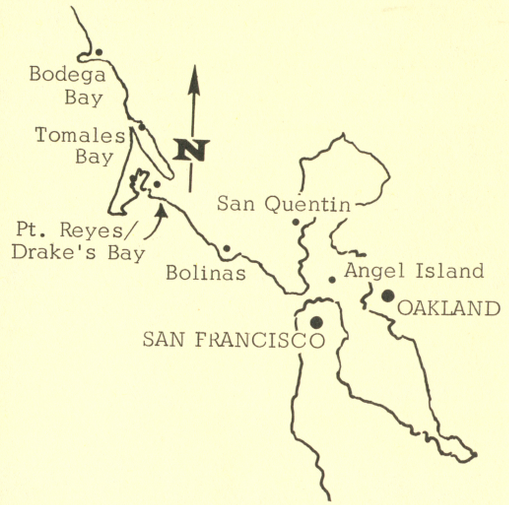
Last January the two investigators told a Berkeley meeting of the National Society for Historical Archeology that, if the Bolinas find indeed turns out to be the long-sought fort, it will rank as the oldest English structure in the Western Hemisphere. The year of Drake's visit — 1579 — appears well substantiated with archival reference, only the place remains to be proven. Authentication of Drake's Fort under the Bolinas reservoir, therefore, would predate Fort Raleigh, Virginia, built in 1590, as the oldest building.

The historical stew over Drake's landing began in 1889 when Dr. George Davidson, president of the California Academy of Sciences, advanced the theory that Queen Elizabeth's explorer may not have gone ashore at Pt. Reyes, but actually discovered San Francisco Bay. But by 1908 he had abandoned that idea and decided that, after all, Drake's Bay was the true site.

Drake's plate found

An historical hurricane blew up in 1936 when a "plate of brasse," described by Drake's chaplain, Francis Fletcher, was discovered by a picnicker near the San Quentin-Kentfield "wye". Later, it was found to have been tossed there by a chauffeur of a San Francisco banker, who had picked up the plate at Drake's Bay in 1933, but failed to recognize its historical significance.

Since then, reams of fact, opinion, theory and conjecture have been written in learned and not so learned journals about the controversy. Society members can decide the issue for themselves when they hear Dr. Neasham's enlightening report on this newest development in a long debate.



Map marks principal coastal sites which have been described by historians as that of Drake's 16th century landing.

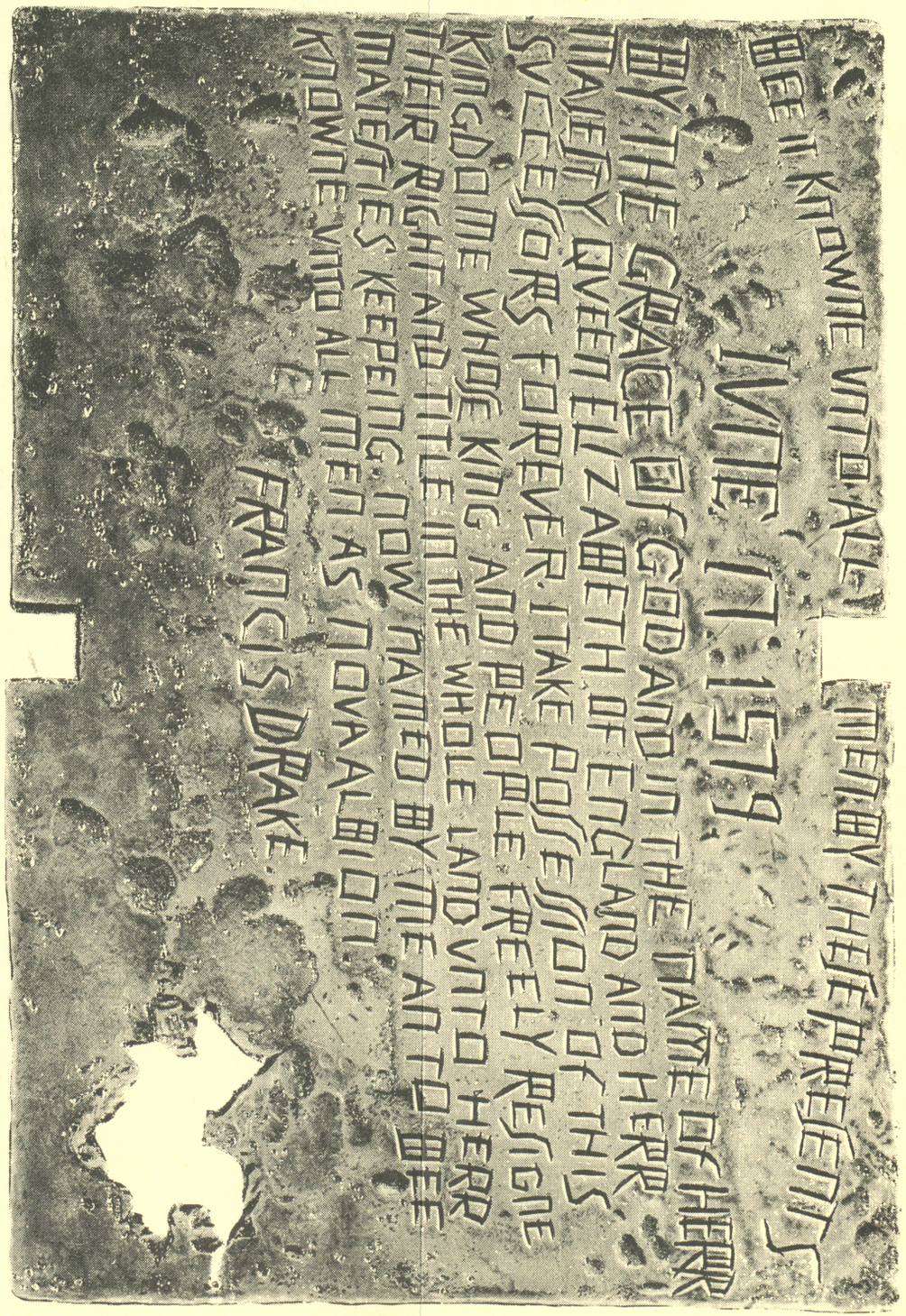
GUEST SPEAKER

Dr. V. Aubrey Neasham comes with a long list of credentials to discuss the matter of Drake's landing site. He is an alumnus of the University of California, where he took his master's degree in 1933 and his doctorate in 1936.

From 1938 to 1952 (with time out for three years' service as a Navy lieutenant in World War II), he was a National Park Service Regional Historian, first in Santa Fe, then in San Francisco. He then moved to the California Division of Beaches and Parks where he served three years as Chief Historian.

From 1964 to 1973 Dr. Neasham was chairman of the Department of Environmental Resources at the California State University, Sacramento, and since 1973 has been Professor Emeritus at that institution.

Presently, he is the president of the Western Heritage, Inc.


BEE IT KNOWNE VNTO ALL
BY THIS PRESENTE
IN THE YEARE OF
OUR LORD GOD
1579
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND IN THE NAME OF HERE
MAIESTY QVEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND AND HERE
SVCCESSORS FOREVER I TAKE POSSESSION OF THIS
KINGDOME WHOSE KING AND PEOPLE FREELY RESIGNE
THEIR RIGHT AND TITLE IN THE WHOLE LAND VNTO HERR
MAIESTIES KEEPING NOW NAMED BY ME AND TO BEE
KNOWNE VNTO ALL MEN AS NOVA ALBION
FRANCIS DRAKE

Drake's "plate of brasse" was originally found near Point Reyes in 1933, then thrown away near San Quentin where it was rediscovered in 1936. Plate is referred to in record kept by Drake's chaplain. It is now preserved in Bancroft Library at the University of California.

New "Chronicles" Okayed

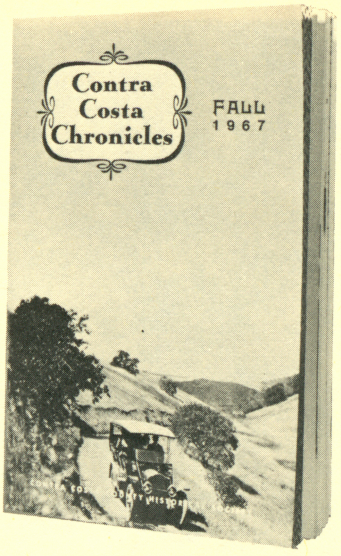
A new issue of the Society's publication, Contra Costa Chronicles, was authorized last January by the Board of Directors. The paperback devoted to historical topics relating to the county was first published in 1965.

Four numbers of the Chronicles have been published so far, the last one being dated Fall 1967. All were edited by the late Leonora Galindo Fink.

The periodical is distributed gratis to members in good standing.

In the new issue will be an original article by Dr. George A. Pettitt, a Society Director, on the home that was built in San Ramon Valley by the pioneer Joel Harlan. Another piece scheduled for this number is a lengthy reminiscence of Contra Costa citizens and their style of life in the county's very earliest days.

Many illustrations from the Louis L. Stein Collection will be included, according to Director Roy Bloss who is compiling the issue.



Distribution to members will be made late next month. Members who have changed their address recently should advise Secretary Jory, so that they can be assured of receiving their copy.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Officers

President ..... Justice A. F. Bray
First Vice President ..... Louis L. Stein
Second Vice President ..... Roy S. Bloss
Secretary ..... James B. Jory
Treasurer ..... George Harlow

Directors

Rev. William N. Abeloe ..... Lafayette
Scott R. Akers ..... Walnut Creek
Roy S. Bloss ..... Alamo
Justice A. F. Bray ..... Martinez
Grant Burton ..... Pleasant Hill
Fern Davis ..... Walnut Creek
Robert R. Dougherty ..... Clayton
Ruth Galindo ..... Concord
George Harlow ..... Richmond
Bertha D. Hellum ..... Pleasant Hill
James B. Jory ..... Martinez
Dr. George A. Pettitt ..... Berkeley
Carol Leland ..... Orinda
Louis L. Stein ..... Berkeley
William Tornheim ..... Antioch

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

DINNER & PROGRAM

Speaker: Dr. V. Aubrey Neasham
Former State Historian

Date: February 28, 1974

Place: Red Rooster Restaurant
2995 Ygnacio Valley Rd.
Walnut Creek

Time: 7:00 p.m., No-Host Cocktails.
7:30 p.m., Dinner, $6.00

Reservations: To J. B. Jory, Sect'y
P.O. Box 190
Martinez, CA 94554

COME ONE! COME ALL!